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Director of Central Intelligence

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MORI/CDF

PLO: Impact of the Lebanese Incursion

Special National Intelligence Estimate

Secret

SNIE 36.11-82

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8 November 1982

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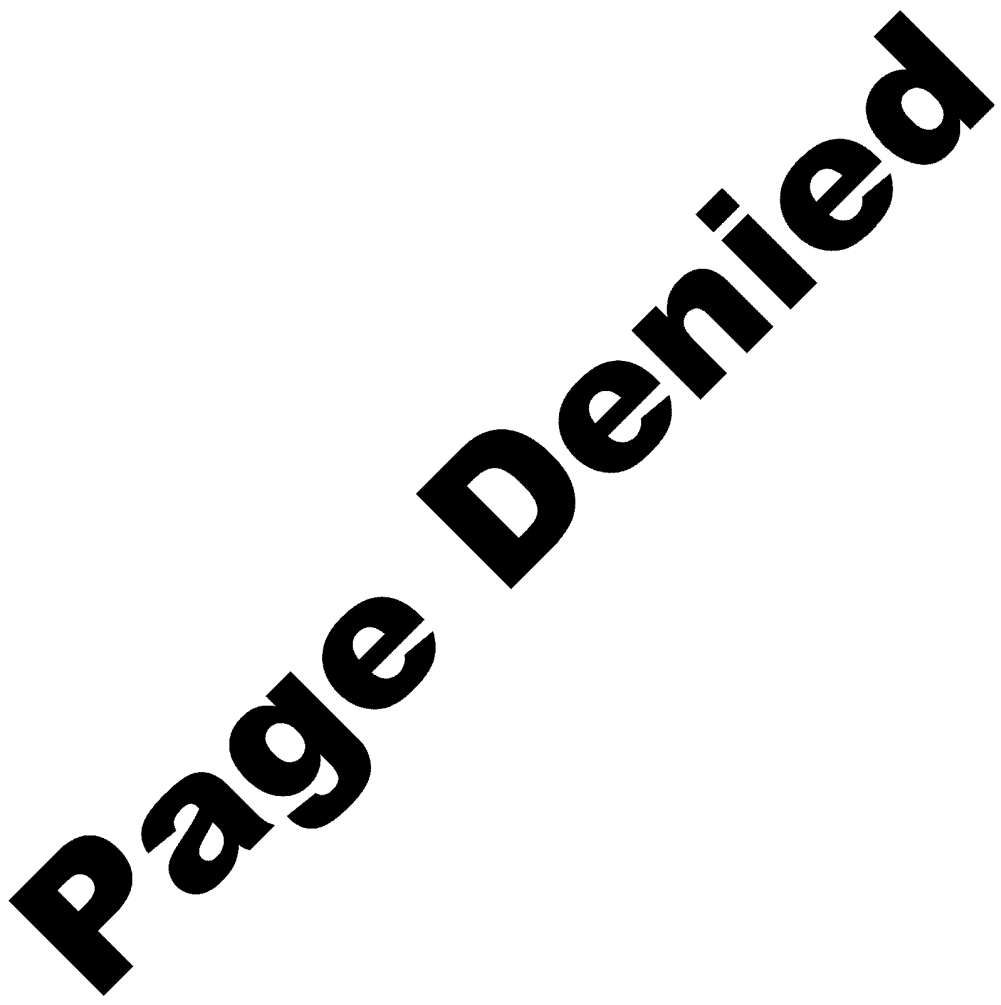

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SNIE 36.11-82

PLO: IMPACT OF THE LEBANESE INCURSION

Information available as of 4 November 1982 was used in the preparation of this Estimate.

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The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State and the Treasury.

Also Participating:

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

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SCOPE NOTE

The evacuation of Palestine Liberation Organization personnel from West Beirut has altered the political climate in the Middle East. The PLO and the Arab states that support it are faced more directly than ever with hard choices about the "Palestinian issue." In the immediate aftermath of the war, Israel has been surprised to discover that its military victory has not produced the expected political dividends and seems to have strengthened its antagonists' political hand. The introduction of both a US and an Arab initiative for dealing with the Palestinians' political future has intensified the debate within the PLO and Israel and among the Arab states.

This Estimate examines the likely effects of the movement of PLO personnel on regional developments over the next six months to a year. It assesses the impact of the relocation on the PLO's cohesiveness and on its future policies. It considers the effects on the host governments and their influence over their guests. It assesses the implications of the evacuation for the political future of the West Bank and Gaza and for the position of both superpowers in the region.

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KEY JUDGMENTS

The PLO scored temporary political gains during the Lebanese crisis by winning an improved international image and focusing attention on the broader Palestinian issue. Its long-term political position, however, is weaker than before the Israeli invasion because it lost its independent base of operation and is more dependent on the Arab states.

The PLO will remain organizationally intact for at least the next year, but political divisions between the moderate and radical wings are increasing over the moderate majority's efforts to involve the organization in Middle East negotiations.

The PLO evacuated about 8,500 personnel from Beirut. The bulk of the PLO's fighting forces remained behind in northern and eastern Lebanon. They now number approximately 13,000,[1] including 1,000 or more reinfiltrated via Syria. Most evacuated personnel outside Syria are likely to stay put for the next several months, barring dramatic Middle East political developments or a sharp decline in PLO morale.

The host governments are keeping the dispersed PLO units under tight security, and the Palestinians have so far had little effect on the hosts' domestic situation. Serious problems could develop if PLO morale and discipline decline.

The member groups are unlikely to countenance the transformation of the PLO into a strictly political movement. Whether they turn to violence on a large scale will depend on the progress of diplomatic efforts to find a solution to the Palestinian problem.

Arafat's leadership within the PLO and his influence in Arab councils is temporarily stronger than ever. He faces a greater challenge, however, from the radical PLO groups committed in varying degrees to leftist ideologies and more militant hostility toward Israel. Although his advantage over other PLO leaders is likely to diminish during the next year, Arafat will remain the dominant figure in the PLO.

The PLO power balance favors the moderates. Arafat and other moderate leaders believe President Reagan's Middle East initiative

[1]This number includes regular military structured units plus paramilitary units theoretically under the control of the military commander for the area. It does not include irregular militia forces with some military training.

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contains positive elements, but they are not willing to give it unqualified endorsement. Progress toward a compromise solution of the Palestinian issue would strengthen the moderates' willingness to confront the radicals. Stalemate will continue to work to the advantage of the radicals.

Even among the moderates, however, there is skepticism about US resolve to remain committed to the plan in the face of Israeli opposition. Arafat will probably claim that the PLO cannot make additional concessions without a demonstration of Israeli willingness to compromise or further indications of US intentions, such as sanctions against Israel if settlement activity on the West Bank continues.

Arafat knows that recognition of Israel would irrevocably split the PLO. His need to seek PLO consensus, his conviction that Israel will reject all compromise, and his wariness concerning US intentions will reinforce his inherent reluctance to make any but minor and incremental diplomatic moves. Arafat, in fact, is more likely to err on the side of caution than to risk splitting the PLO.

Syrian President Assad's increased influence over the PLO radicals improves his ability to prevent the PLO from adopting policies he dislikes. Arafat, however, is less dependent on Syria and more willing to take stands independent of Damascus, but he is unlikely to agree to any Middle East settlement that Syria rejects.

The Arab states seem prepared to continue financing the PLO at roughly the same level as before the Beirut evacuation. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait apparently provide the bulk of the aid received by Fatah and the Fatah-dominated central PLO treasury. Libya is the main source of the radicals' funds.

The PLO in the near term is likely to preserve its enhanced position in Arab councils. The moderate Arab states and the PLO will work to keep their policies from diverging.

If Arafat can maintain his influence over PLO radicals, he is likely during the next year to agree in principle to some form of Palestinian affiliation with Jordan and to give Jordan a qualified mandate to explore Middle East peace initiatives. Most Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza will continue to accept the PLO as their representative, unless a breakthrough in the peace process convinces them the PLO is missing a real chance for an advantageous agreement with Israel.

The PLO mainstream would welcome a dialogue with the United States but it is unlikely to pay the price of unconditional recognition of Israel.

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The USSR's ineffective response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon severely strained relations between the PLO and Moscow. The Palestinians are muting their dissatisfaction, however, because they value the Soviet connection as a vital source of arms and potential leverage on the United States and the Arabs.

Moscow will attempt to disrupt efforts to establish a PLO-US dialogue, knowing that PLO participation in a US-sponsored peace initiative would severely diminish Soviet influence. The Soviets will try to reconcile differences between Arafat and Syrian President Assad. The widening rift between them complicates Moscow's efforts to stay on good terms with both.

As long as Arafat can credibly hold out prospects for progress in the diplomatic arena and maintain PLO discipline, the PLO groups will probably forgo international terrorism. Radical elements will be harder to control in the present circumstances, however, and even the moderate leaders may be forced to approve limited attacks to maintain their leadership if diplomatic successes are not forthcoming.

Non-PLO Palestinian extremists and sympathetic non-Palestinian terrorist groups have already stepped up terrorist attacks as a result of the Israeli invasion. Their plans increasingly include US and moderate Arab targets along with the traditional Jewish and Israeli interests.

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North and South Yemen

76. The two Yemens appear to be coping without major problems with their complement of PLO evacuees. In North Yemen they have been housed in a new military camp built especially for them 37 kilometers south of Sanaa. The government seems to have chosen an isolated area in the hope that they would be encouraged to leave. By mid-October, however, the Yemenis were making plans to receive the families of the PLO personnel, indicating they expect a long presence.

77. North Yemen asked to receive only Fatah units, and traded some PFLP members included among the original arrivals for some Fatah members sent to South Yemen. The Fatah elements reportedly are well disciplined, but about 20 Palestinians described by the government as radicals have been imprisoned for "misbehaving." The Palestinians are permitted to travel to Sanaa during the day but must return to the camp at night. Officers are permitted to carry sidearms in Sanaa. All others must remain unarmed outside the camp.

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that they may be settling in for an extended stay. At the current time, most are housed in a remote complex built as an agricultural cooperative, a source of annoyance to its intended inhabitants. The Palestinians have complained that the facilities are inadequate. As many as 300 may have remained in Aden.

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